

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

The questions I ask myself as I write 1943 instead of 1942 at the head of the News-Letter are no doubt in your minds also. What will this new year bring to us? What does it demand of us?

In our outward fortunes, national and individual, it will bring us many things that we do not foresee or expect, but these we can take as they come. What concerns us more closely is that it will effect changes in ourselves, for good or for evil, of which we may be scarcely aware at the time though their consequences may be far-reaching. We may be insensibly infected, coarsened, or wearied out by the evils we took up arms to oppose, or by an inward renewal we may become the recipients and transmitters of new spiritual life. Spiritual victory will demand from us more than is needed to defeat the Axis Powers. To overcome the forces of disintegration the constructive powers of faith, imagination, compassion and good-will must acquire an altogether new volume and pitch. And they have to begin to do this *now*. It is self-deception to be content with dreaming and planning what we intend to do when the war is over. What it is possible to achieve then will depend on the foundations we lay now and the kind of people that through our present actions we become.

I propose to deal this week with one great issue to which this relates.

THE INDIAN SITUATION

In relation to the ends which alone give meaning to the war, the situation in India is thoroughly bad. The first thing required of us is to be aware of that fact and to care about it.

The United Nations are publicly committed to respect the right of all peoples to choose that form of government under which they will live. In India a large number of the leaders of Congress have been for nearly six months in prison. Very little imagination is needed to realize the feelings of bitterness and hatred which this fact must arouse in the minds of those who trust and revere them. As the months pass the bitterness strikes deeper and deeper roots. The growing alienation between two peoples who are united in a common detestation of Nazi ideas is deplorable; the widening misunderstanding between those who in innumerable individual instances have formed ties of mutual regard and intimate personal friendship is intolerable. The past few months have witnessed in some areas widespread outbreaks of violence and sabotage, involving large loss of life. These have brought about counter-measures of harsh repression, including heavy collective fines on villages.

The repercussions of the tension in India are world-wide. American opinion has been profoundly disturbed by what has happened. Few people in this country are aware of the volume and sharpness of American criticism of British policy owing to the restrictions imposed by the American censorship. The criticism is often uninformed, sometimes unjust and beside the mark. But it is one of the major facts in the relations between the two peoples that in wide circles in America, otherwise well-disposed to this country, there

is a deep distrust of what is understood, rightly or wrongly, as British imperialism, and that India is looked on as the test case. The *National News-Letter* a fortnight ago published a letter from a correspondent in West China, which described the effect of the Indian situation in increasing anti-British feeling in China.

THE POLITICAL PROBLEM

The situation is urgent. To allow the rift to continue or widen would be the final defeat of the hope that the historical association of Britain and India might pave the way to understanding and co-operation between the western world and eastern peoples and lay foundations for a future commonwealth of mankind. General Smuts declared a fortnight ago that "next to winning the war, the emancipation of India without internal disruption is perhaps the greatest prize in the world."

What can be done? The critics of British policy who imagine that there is some simple action within the power of the British Government to take that would end the political deadlock are quite wrong. There have been many mistakes and faults in British policy; but India has now been offered, after the war, independence absolute and complete. The Viceroy was fully justified in maintaining in a recent speech that the present troubles in India are due not to the reluctance of the British Government to surrender power, but to its expressed readiness to do so. The tension between the Hindu and Moslem communities has been intensified by the prospect of British withdrawal from India. It is confirmed from every quarter that the bitterness between the two communities is more acute than at any time since British rule was established in India. So long as a neutral authority held the scales, communal dissension could be kept within bounds, manifesting itself only in an occasional riot; but the Hindu and Moslem communities now find themselves facing a fundamental struggle for political power. There is open talk of civil war.

The situation is one of those in which men with their limited and puny powers seem to be caught in the grip of inexorable forces. The best intentions meet with frustration; the most legitimate desires seem incapable of fulfilment.

We can understand the reasons, explained with great fairness by Professor Coupland in his admirable pamphlet *The Cripps Mission*,¹ which made it next to impossible for the Congress leaders to accept the proposals of Sir Stafford Cripps. The Moslem aversion to domination by a community with a different religion and civilization evokes our sympathy. The British Government, however ready to grant full independence, has the immediate responsibility of providing for the safety and well-being of the peoples of India in time of war. It is not selfish, imperial motives, but loyalty to the good, as they understand it, of the Indian peoples, and to the cause for which the United Nations are making supreme sacrifices, that block the way to meeting the demands of Congress.

The situation is made still more baffling by Mr. Gandhi's invincible belief in non-violence. This is not shared by all the leaders of Congress. But it is an almost insuperable obstacle to Mr. Gandhi's participation in, or active support of, an Indian government pledged to the vigorous prosecution of the war; and his prestige is such that it would be difficult for other leaders of Congress to take part in a government of which he was known to disapprove. It is clear that we are concerned here with issues that far transcend the present war. They have to do with ultimate convictions about right and wrong, the final judgment of which must be left to history. It is conceivable that distant generations may look on Mr. Gandhi as the apostle of sanity in a world gone mad. But we have to walk by the light we have, and it is the conscientious belief of the great majority in the United Nations and of many in India that our present duty is to resist by force the evil purposes of the Axis Powers. There is no means by which these two irreconcilable moral convictions can find expression in common policy and action; the deadlock is complete.

There is no solution in maintaining the *status quo*. Neither the Moslem community nor any of the major political groups desire British rule to continue; Indian political opinion is practically unanimous in demanding independence. For Great Britain to make the

¹ Oxford University Press, 1s.

inability of the Indian communities to agree an excuse for seeking a new lease of power would be fatal. It would be a reversal of the steady trend and growth of both British and Indian political thought and feeling for the best part of a century. It would create a profound, perhaps irremediable, breach in sentiment between the United Nations, and wreck all present hopes for a better order based on the principles to which they have committed themselves.

We are confronted in India with a real impasse. As things are, an immediate political solution is beyond human contrivance. It is situations of this kind that are often most fraught with religious meaning. Our task as Christians is to seek that meaning—not to insist feverishly on this or that device which experience has shown to be useless, but to acknowledge our impotence and look in faith to God. Such acceptance of the situation is, of course, significant only if it springs not from diminished vigour but from a stronger hold on reality and an enhanced vitality.

WHAT CAN WE DO ?

Does this mean that there is nothing we can do in the meantime ? Far from it. The impasse relates to an immediate political understanding. But the inability to reach a political understanding has deep psychological and spiritual causes. Professor Coupland tells us that the major impression of his visit to India during the four months preceding the Cripps Mission was the profound distrust which he found everywhere of Great Britain. For a brief moment during the negotiations belief and hope were rekindled. But the break-down of the attempt and subsequent events have created among Indians a state of disillusionment, despair, resentment and bitterness greater than has ever existed before.

Our first task is to dispel this miasma of mistrust. It is surely not beyond the power of this country to recreate faith in British intentions, to restore hope, and to reforge the bonds of goodwill and mutual understanding. It is certainly worth a supreme effort. Feelings of distrust and suspicion poison the whole atmosphere. Friendliness and understanding are also contagious. An improvement in the relations between British and Indians would make it easier for the latter to find a solution of their own communal problems. The restoration of goodwill in India would, moreover, contribute more than almost anything else to increasing the stock of mutual trust, ability to understand and willingness to co-operate, which are indispensable for dealing with the problems of the post-war world.

Missionary institutions and the Indian church itself have not been immune from this prevailing suspicion and bitterness. There is danger of growth of an anti-British and anti-foreign spirit which would be injurious to the life and work of the Church. This is manifestly the point at which Christian effort to restore the situation must begin. It would be an excellent thing if a small deputation from the Churches could visit India to convey to Indian Christians the goodwill of their fellow-Christians in Britain, and if a parallel visit by one or two Indian Christian leaders could be made to this country. The possibility of such action is at present being examined by the leaders of the Churches and the missionary societies.

In the larger national sphere every support needs to be given to those in public life who are striving to bring about a better understanding. In this wider field no one could do so much to bring about a transformation in the situation as the Prime Minister. He has an unrivalled command of the spoken word. The nation owes him a profound debt for the speeches in which he has expressed, interpreted and fortified its resolve. Unfortunately among his utterances those relating to India have been the least happy. His statement in the House of Commons in September created a mood of blank despair in India, and dismay in the United States. His critics made far too little allowance for the fact that, with the heavy responsibility for the cause of the United Nations resting on his shoulders, he was dealing with a situation in which what seemed an unprovoked and wanton outbreak of disorder and violence gravely increased the perils which those nations were facing. But serious harm was done, and he has unique power to repair it.

He, as no one else, could provide the foundation for a determined and sustained effort to convince Indians of this country's settled resolve to work for a free and united India, and to leave nothing in its power undone to enable Indians to find a solution of their communal differences.¹

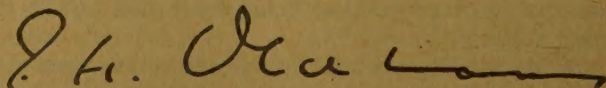
Secondly, both British and Indians must accustom themselves to thinking about Indian problems and their solution in relation to the interests of other nations beyond themselves. In that larger setting, new aspects of the problems will begin to be seen. Through long pre-occupation with those problems British and Indian minds have come to move in certain grooves; the fresh approach of those less directly involved may help to break up this rigidity.

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr is quite right in maintaining in an article in *Christianity and Crisis* that the United Nations have a stake in the solution of the Indian problem, and that it offers a splendid opportunity for bringing to bear the common counsel which is essential for post-war settlements. His particular proposal of a commission, on which China, America, Russia and some of the smaller nations would be represented, is not a device well calculated to further the ends in view, and it is exceedingly doubtful whether it would be welcomed by Indian political leaders. But the resources of diplomacy are many, and a significant and promising action is the appointment by the President of the United States of the former American ambassador at Rome to serve as his personal representative at Delhi. Both on general and on personal grounds the step deserves, and has received, the warmest welcome.

There is a third form of action, about which, though it may be the most fruitful of all, it is difficult to write, because what is potent can so easily degenerate into what is futile, and what ought to be costly can quickly become cheap. If the impasse arises from the fact that finite men with their limited apprehension are shut within barriers across which they cannot communicate with one another, by what means can the waters of life rise to a level at which they overflow the sundering banks? The Christian answer is—through *grace*. Our attention was directed last week to the subject of prayer, and we were reminded that it is those at the end of their resources who are in a position to learn what it is really to pray. The impasse in India should deepen our desire to pray. Some of us may be able to set aside five minutes each day, others to say one "Our Father" daily for India. We may also, by an act of remembrance, comprehend the needs of India in our general prayers, in which we seek, and open our being to receive, the divine quickening which gives birth to new thoughts in the minds of men, releases new springs of compassion and sympathy, and infuses new healing influences into human life.

As the News-Letter goes to press, we have been overwhelmed by the loss of the Rev. F. C. Maxwell, the Secretary of the Christian Frontier Council, who died unexpectedly on December 28th.

Yours sincerely,



¹ Mr. Norman Goodall, in his pamphlet *The Indian Deadlock* (Livingstone Press, 42 Broadway, S.W. 1. 4d.) which is one of the best things that has been written about the Indian situation, makes an impressive plea to the Prime Minister to use his unequalled authority to interpret to India the concern and purpose of Great Britain.

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